Health Literacy: An Indicator for Health Promotion

Mahmoud Tavousi^{1*}, Ali Montazeri², Aliasghar Haerimehrizi³

New health care created new needs and people have to make correct decisions for their health. As such 'health literacy' became an important factor for promoting public health and enhancing the quality of health care. It has been in the core attention of policy makers. Health literacy is beyond the ability to read, write and understand the meanings of words and numbers, and rather it includes a set of reading and listening skills, as well as analysis, decision making and the ability to apply these skills in health settings. In fact, it does not necessarily relates to the years of education or simply reading ability. Health literacy 'is the person's capacity to obtain, process and understand basic information and health services that are necessary to making proper decisions' [1-5].

It is worth noting that assessment of health literacy does not test the public's general information on health and should not be viewed from such a perspective.

Health literacy is a set of individual, social and cognitive capacities and skills that facilitate peoples' access to health information and understanding and ultimately practicing it in order to achieve a better health. Evidence indicate that health literacy in addition to association with age, education level, gender, socioeconomic status, insurance status and the status of utilization of health services, is a stronger predictor of health [6-11].

Scientific documents published on the impact of health literacy on individuals' health suggest that many of the adverse consequences related to health can occur as a result of literacy. inadequate health People with inadequate health literacy have little methods of disease knowledge about prevention, poor self-care and less preventive care skills, especially against chronic diseases and have more problems in their treatment, are confused with the media health messages, may not understand medical care

^{1.} Associated professor, Health Metrics Research Center, Iranian Institute for Health Sciences Research, ACECR, Tehran, Iran Email: Tayousi@acecr.ac.ir

²⁻ Professor, Health Metrics Research Center, Iranian Institute for Health Sciences Research, ACECR, Tehran, Iran Email: Montazeri@ acecr.ac.ir

³⁻ Instructor, Health Metrics Research Center, Iranian Institute for Health Sciences Research, ACECR, Tehran, Iran Email: haeri.stat@gmail.com

trainings and interpret them wrongly, are less likely to understand and thus practice/serve the written and oral recommendations of health professionals, less likely share their problems with the health care staff", have more trouble in finding appropriate health care services for themselves and their children, are less likely to follow up their health condition, have higher rates of admission and visit to the doctor, and impose more health costs to the health system [12-24]. Accordingly, we can say that health important literacy is an indicator for individuals' monitoring health. Perhaps measuring health literacy while reducing health costs, can lead to health improvement. Although national assessment of health literacy in Iran is new, the results of two large studies (using different tools) have shown that the situation of this index in the country is not optimal [8, 25]. However, it is expected that, with the spread of information networks to some extent overcome the problem. It seems that we need to allocate a significant portion of healthcare resources for education and health improvement literacy interventions, and inclination toward a dynamic and continuous move achieve an appropriate satisfactory level of health and equity in health and access to health services.

References

1. Bohlman LN, Panzer AM, Kindig DA.

- Health literacy: a prescription to end confusion. Washington (DC): National Academies Press: 2004.
- Paasche-Orlow MK, Parker RM, Gazmararian JA, Nielsen-Bohlman LT, Rudd RR. The prevalence of limited health literacy. JGIM 2005; 20(2): 175-84.
- 3. Kickbusch I, Pelikan JM, Apfel F, Tsouros AD (WHO Region Office for Europe). Health literacy: The Solid Facts. 2013. Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/190655/e96854. pdf 2017.
- 4. Sihota S, Lennard L. Health literacy: being able to make the most of health. London: National Consumer Council; 2004.
- Berkman ND, Davis TC, McCormack L. Health literacy: What is it? J Health Commun 2010; 15(S2): 9-19.
- Adams RJ, Stocks NP, Wilson DH, Hill CL, Gravier S, Kickbusch I, Beilby JJ. Health literacy: A new concept for general practice? Aust Fam Physician 2009; 38(3): 144-7.
- 7. Javadzade H, Sharifirad Gh, Reisi M, Tavassoli E, Rajati F. Health Literacy among Adults of Isfahan, Iran. JHSR 2013; 9: 540-9. [In Persian]
- 8. Tehrani Banihashemi SA, Amir Khani A, Haghdoust A, Alavian M, Asghari Fard H, Baradaran H, Barghamdi M, Parsinia S, Fathi Ranjbar S. Health literacy in five

- province and relative effective factors. Strides in Development of Medical Education 2007; 4: 1-9.
- Kristine Sørensen K, Pelikan JM, Rothlin F, Ganahl K, Slonska Z, Doyle G, Fullam J, Kondilis B, Agrafiotis D, Uiters E, Falcon M, Mensing M, Tchamov K, van den Broucke S, Brand H. Health literacy in Europe: comparative results of the European health literacy survey (HLS-EU). Eur J Public Health 2015; 25(6): 1053-8.
- 10. Shahla Ghanbari SH, Majlessi F, Ghaffari M, Mahmoodi Majdabadi M. Evaluation of health literacy of pregnant women in urban health centers of Shahid Beheshti Medical University. Daneshvar Med 2012; 19(97): 1-13. [In Persian]
- 11. Tol A, Shojaezadeh D, Eslami AA, Alhani F, Mohajeri Tehrani MR, Sharifirad GhR. Analyses of some relevant predictors on self-management of type 2 diabetic patients. Hospital 2011; 1038: 45-52. [In Persian]
- 12. Williams MV, Parker RM, Baker DW, Coates W, Nurss J. The impact of inadequate functional health literacy on patients' understanding of diagnosis, prescribed medications, and compliance. AEM 1995; 2: 386.
- 13. Bennett CL, Ferreira MR, Davis TC, Kaplan J, Weinberger M, Kuzel T, Seday MA, Sartor O. Relation between literacy, race, and stage of presentation among low-

- income patients with prostate cancer. JCO 1998; 16(9): 3101-4.
- 14. Nutbeam D. Health literacy as a public health goal: a challenge for contemporary health education and communication strategies into the 21st century. Health Promot Int 2000; 15(3): 259-67.
- 15. Berkman ND, Sheridan SL, Donahue KE, Halpern DJ, Crotty K. Low health literacy and health outcomes: an updated systematic review. Ann Intern Med 2011; 155(2): 97-107.
- 16. Peterson PN, Shetterly SM, Clarke CL, Bekelman DB, Chan PS, Allen LA, et al. Health literacy and outcomes among patients with heart failure. JAMA 2011; 305(16): 1695-701.
- 17. Mazor KM, Roblin DW, Williams AE, Greene SM, Gaglio B, Field TS, Costanza ME, Han PK, Saccoccio L, Calvi J, Cove E, Cowan R. Health literacy and cancer prevention: Two new instruments to assess comprehension. Patient Educ Couns 2012; 88(1): 54-60.
- 18. American Cancer Society, Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards. National health education standards: achieving health literacy. Washington (DC): American Cancer Society; 1997.
- 19. Baker DW, Gazmararian JA, Williams MV, Scott T, Parker RM, Green D, Ren J, Peel J. Functional health literacy and the risk of

- hospital admission among Medicare managed care enrollees. Am J Public Health 2002; 92: 1278-83.
- 20. Baker DW, Parker RM, Williams MV, Clark WS, Nurss J. The relationship of patient reading ability to selfreported health and use of health services. Am J Public Health 1997; 87: 1027-30.
- 21. Schillinger D, Grumbach K, Piette J, Wang F, Osmond D, Daher C, Palacios J, Sullivan GD, Bindman AB. Association of health literacy with diabetes outcomes. JAMA 2002; 288: 475-82.
- 22. Scott TL, Gazmararian JA, Williams MV, Baker DW. Health literacy and preventive health care use among Medicare enrollees

- in a managed care organization. Med Care 2002; 40: 395-404.
- 23. Howard DH, Sentell T, Gazmararian JA. Impact of health literacy on socioeconomic and racial differences in health in an elderly population. JGIM 2006; 21: 857-61.
- 24. Benjamin J, Jane V, Hayden B. Can This Patient Read and Understand Written Health Information? JAMA 2010; 304(1): 76-84.
- 25. Tavousi M, Haeri Mehrizi AA, Rafiefar SH, Solimanian A, Sarbandi F, Ardestani M, Hashemi A, Montazeri A. Health literacy for Iranian Adults (HELIA): development and psychometric properties. Payesh 2016; 15(1): 95-102. [In Persian]